...EVEN SO,

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT IT DOESN'T SUIT YOU.

STORY XII

Sénart Sopites

YOUR HAIR IS WAY TOO WHITE.

SFX: POUT...

EARS ASIDE...

PL... PLEASE STOP MAKING FUN OF ME...

PASSING YOU OFF AS A CITY GIRL WON'T WORK... YEAH, WE'LL HAVE TO GO WITH YOU BEING A NUN.

AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHY THIS IS THE ONLY PLACE YOU CAN BE. GIVE IT UP.

WELL, THERE'S CERTAINLY NO WAY YOU COULD LIVE AS A CITY GIRL.

GOING AFTER HIM WHEN HE'S AT HIS WEAKEST IS A FUNDA-MENTAL.

YEAH. AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHEN AN OLD MAN FEELS THE MOST LONELY.

BUT WHAT WILL YOU DO? WAIT UNTIL DINNER?

IS THAT SO...?

IN ALL LIKELIHOOD, SOPITES WON'T BE SUCH A PUSHOVER.

...WELL,

I DO NEED TO BE AT THAT LEVEL OF READINESS.

THAT'S TRUE~~

I MEAN, HE HAS KEPT THE SECRET OF DAMASCUS STEEL HIDDEN ALL THIS TIME.

SO KEEPING IT HIDDEN WAS NO SIMPLE TASK.

THE KNIGHTS HAVE CHASED DOWN TALES OF DAMASCUS STEEL THO-ROUGHLY IN THE PAST,

I STRUCK OUT.

5 Hours Earlier ---

WELL...

I WENT A BIT TOO FAR.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ONE'S WEAKNESS IS JUST AWFUL...

I DIDN'T INTEND TO TAKE THINGS TOO FAR.

BUT SHE WAS QUITE STUBBORN, SO I TRIED PUSHING HER A BIT.

HOWEVER.. SHE REACTED ODDLY.

.....?

I'M ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT THE DOCUMENT YOU FOUND IS WHAT I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR.

YET IRINE BRUSHED ASIDE MY ATTEMPT AT INTIMIDATION..

SOMETHING IS GIVING HER THE STRENGTH TO RESIST ME.

IT'S HER HATRED OF YOU...

THERE MUST BE SOME-THING.

IT MAY BE POSSIBLE AGAINST SOMEONE ELSE, BUT... IRINE IS A SHREWD ONE.

IF THAT IS IN FACT THE CASE, THEN I CAN ACCEPT IT... SOMETHING LIKE THAT WOULD HAVE TO BE...

LIKE MAGDALA?

...YEAH, LIKE MAGDALA...

ギィ…

SO HOW DID IT GO WITH YOU?

THAT BRUTISH SIDE OF YOU IS RELIABLE ...

NO DICE.

I PUSHED THE YOUNG LADY HARD ENOUGH TO GET TOLD OFF, BUT...

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PERHAPS THE TALK OF RARE SWORDS OF HIGH QUALITY FROM DAMASCUS STEEL WAS ALL A JOKE.

IRINE WAS SHAKEN BY WHAT'S IN THIS, YET IT ALSO MADE HER STUBBORNLY REFUSE TO TALK.

SPEAKING HONESTLY, IS THERE ANY BENEFIT IN CONCEDING THE TRUTH ...?

YOU CAN'T ACCEPT THAT, CAN YOU...? NOT AT THIS POINT...

BUT I DON'T THINK THAT ANY HARM WOULD COME TO IRINE FOR OWNING UP TO IT...

EVEN IF THE TALK OF DAMASCUS STEEL IS TRUE, THERE WOULD BE SIGNIFI-CANCE IN SAYING "IT'S A LIE".

IF SO, AND SHE STILL DOESN'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT...

THEN IT'S BECAUSE THERE'S SOME-THING SHE HAS TO PROTECT.

In that case, could this thing with Damascus steel be the truth after all ...?

...EH?

WHAT DO YOU THINK, LIL-CHAN?

WELL...

THAT'S YOUR HONEST IMPRESSION, HUH?

IT'S A PAIN, BUT I'LL HAVE TO CONFRONT THEM ONE BY ONE.

SFX: MMM...

SOME-THING LIKE...

SOME "BLACK MAGIC" METHOD OF REFINING IT ...?

SFX: HMM...

I MADE SOME PROGRESS TOWARD REFINING DAMASCUS STEEL.

?.....

AND WHAT DID YOU DO?

HM?

SFX: GRAB

THE BIRTH-PLACES OF THE CRAFTSMEN!

YOU MEAN, ASSUMING PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT DAMASCUS STEEL, WHERE WOULD THOSE PEOPLE BE?

YOU WERE LOOKING FOR ACCOUNTS OF DAMASCUS STEEL AND THUS DIDN'T NOTICE, DID YOU?

FOR THE AREA BURNA COMES FROM, IT HAS TOO MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE SOMEWHAT WEALTHY.

TOPPING THE LIST IS THE CLAUSINI AREA.

THERE ARE 5 AREAS, GIVE OR TAKE.

Then the next move will be...

HMPH...

SUCH A PITY THOUGH.

SUCH WEALTH STRATIFICATION IS AMPLE REASON FOR SQUEEZING THE PEOPLE OF CLAUSINI, ONE BY ONE.

HE'S ABOUT 72 YEARS OLD.

HIS NAME IS SÉNART SOPITES.

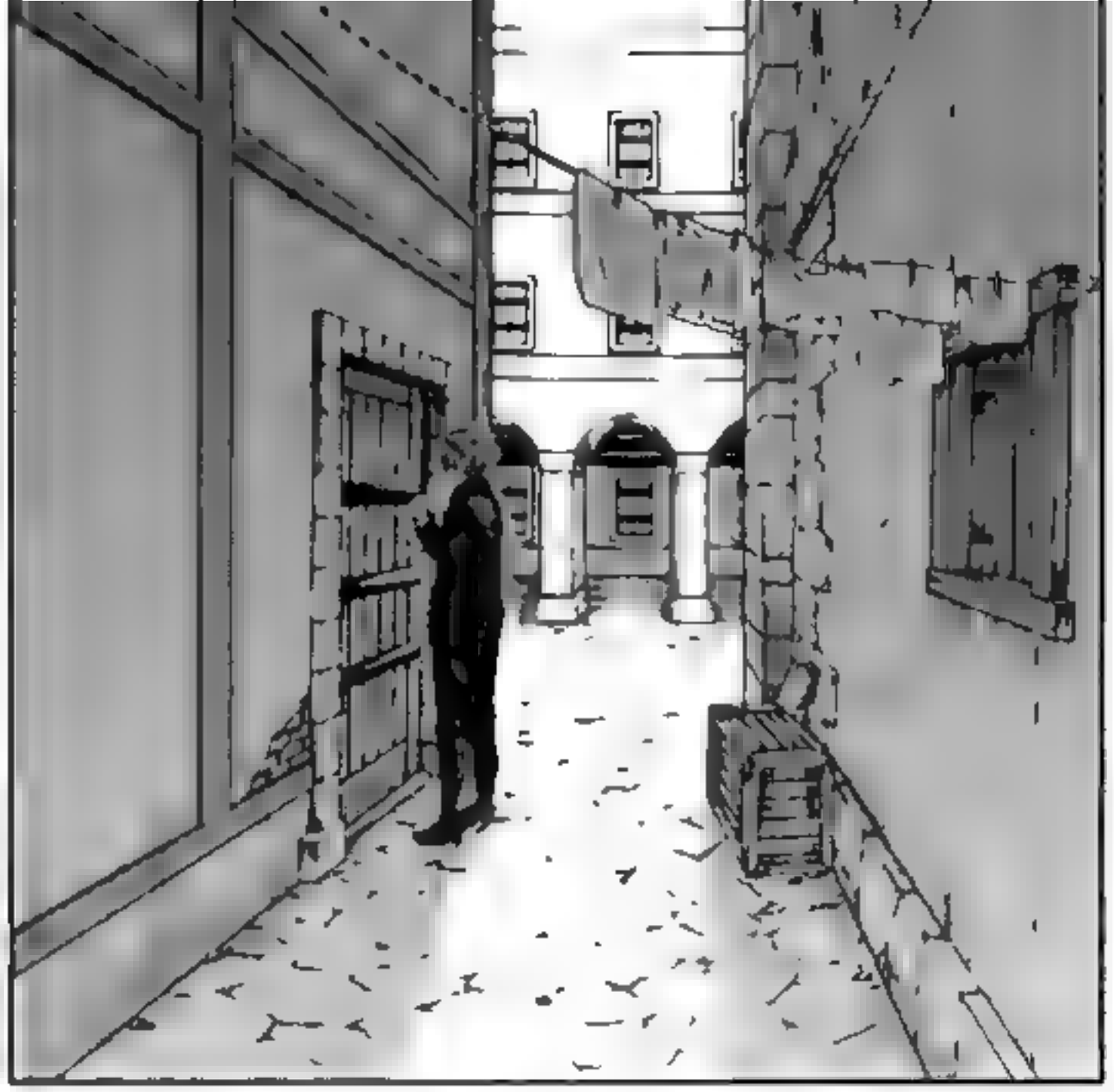
THERE'S ONLY ONE OTHER MASTER WHO DESCENDED FROM CLAUSINI WHO KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED THEN.

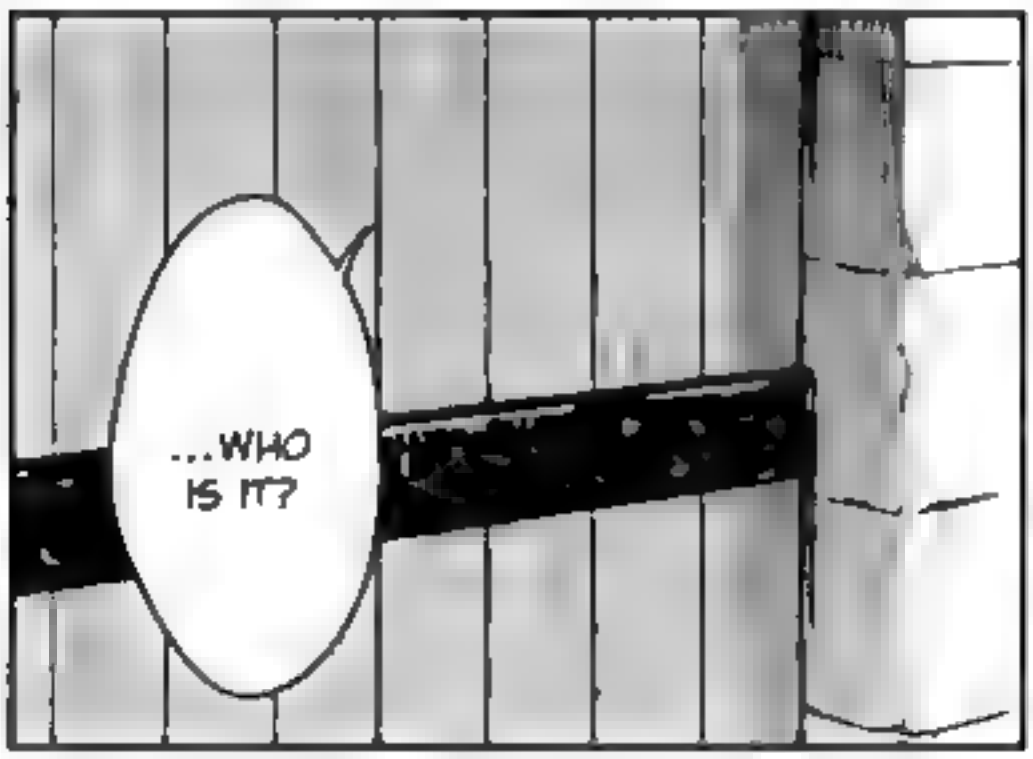
I REALLY WOULD RATHER NOT DO THIS, BUT... I'LL HAVE TO BEG A WEAK OLD MAN.

THE ONLY CHOICE IS TO PRESS OLD MAN SOPITES FOR ANSWERS.

...WHATEVER. AS IT STANDS, WE'RE AT A DEAD END.

コンコン
SOPITES-SAN.




...WHO IS IT?

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WELL, WELL.

I'M WITH THE KNIGHTS.
OH!

I AM AN ALCHEMIST BY THE NAME OF KUUSLA.

WHAT BUSINESS DO YOU HAVE WITH A SENILE RETIREE?

I WILL HEAR WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY

YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF DINNER, AREN'T YOU?

YES.

IT'S JUST ABOUT TO START.

PLEASE, COME INSIDE

I "JUST HAPPENED" TO HAVE IT SET FOR TWO.

SHALL WE EAT TOGETHER?

THIS OLD MAN.. I CAN'T LET MY GUARD DOWN—

Two portions ---

IN MY ERROR, I CAUSE IRINE-SAN TO CRY.

AS SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO HURT OTHERS, YOU COULD TELL RIGHT AWAY.

WELL SHE IS A STOUT-HEARTED GIRL

I SEE SO IT'S KAZAN, IS IT ..?

KAZAN

I WANT TO BE CHOSEN AS ONE OF THE FIRST PILGRIMS TO KAZAN.

IT'S ALL PART OF THE INITIATION RITES GOING ON

PLUS,

SO...

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT REFINING DAMASCUS STEEL?

SO WHY IS IT THAT YOU KEEP YOUR MOUTH FIRMLY SHUT?

IRINE SAID THE SAME THING.

YOU OF ALL PEOPLE DEFINITELY KNOW SOMETHING.

I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING.

ONLY IRINE AND I KNOW THAT.

WE'RE THE ONLY TWO PEOPLE IN THE WORLD.

...LET'S STOP BEATING AROUND THE BUSH.

NATURALLY I'D WANT TO AVOID DOING THAT, IF AT ALL POSSIBLE.

PLUS... *THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT'S SIMILAR TO US.*

IF YOU'D DUMPED IRINE NAKED INTO MERCENARY HOUSING, YOU'D OWN UP TO IT TOO, WOULDN'T YOU?

TO BE HONEST, WHAT I CAN'T TELL YOU IS

THAT OUR DREAMS WERE GRANTED.

HOWEVER... IRINE'S DREAM IS DIFFERENT.

...AS AN OLD MAN, THEY'RE JUST MEMORIES OF THE PAST.

PROBABLY WHAT YOU'D CALL... DREAMS.

dream...?

Irine's

IRINE SAID...

SOMETHING LIKE THAT ...?

IRINE SAID THAT PEOPLE WITH DREAMS CANNOT BECOME GOOD CRAFTSMEN.

ER..

THINGS ENDED UP LIKE THIS BECAUSE HE DIED WITHOUT SAYING WHAT WAS IMPORTANT.

NO... THE STUPID ONE IS ROBERT.

THAT STUPID GIRL...

HE WAS AN UTTER FOOL WHO MADE THE MISTAKE OF PUTTING TOO MUCH FAITH IN HIS PARTNERS!

IF THINGS HADN'T GONE THIS WAY, I COULD STILL ASCEND TO HEAVEN, PRETENDING I HADN'T SEEN IT...

HOWEVER..

I WOULD LIKE YOU TO TAKE IRINE WITH YOU WHEN YOU LEAVE THIS CITY.

IF, BY CHANCE, YOU ARE CHOSEN AS ONE OF THE FIRST EMIGRANTS,

I HAVE A REQUEST

BUT YOU'RE KEEPING IT HIDDEN, AND YOU'RE SAYING THAT IF THE TECHNIQUE WERE DISCOVERED, YOU'D WANT US TO TAKE IRINE WITH US...?

WE WANT THE TECHNO-LOGICAL SKILL REQUIRED TO BE CHOSEN AS PILGRIMS.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING ..

.....?

IT'S A MEANS OF EXPRESSING MY AFFECTION.

スゥ...

I HAVE HOPES FOR THE TECHNOLOGY.

IF THE RESULT IS THE SAME, I WON'T BE SO FAR GONE THAT I CAN'T SAY I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE PROCESS.

IF THERE IS A REASON FOR LIVING, THEN SURELY THIS IS IT.

DON'T YOU AGREE?

THERE'S A STORY BEHIND THE PROCESS TO GET THE DESIRED RESULT.

ANYTHING HE WISHED FOR, SHE WOULD TRY HER HARDEST TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

AND DESPITE THE WEIGHT SHE CARRIED AS A RESULT, ROBERT NEVER REALIZED WHAT A BURDEN HE HAD PLACED UPON HER.

IN THE PAST, THAT GIRL WAS ENTHRALLED.

WHAT?

WHETHER OR NOT YOU CAN OBTAIN THAT METAL IS ANOTHER PROBLEM ALTOGETHER.

PLUS, EVEN IF ALL OF YOU MANAGE TO FIND THE SECRET OF DAMASCUS STEEL ON YOUR OWN...

THERE'S SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNIQUE REQUIRED TO PRODUCE IT.

IT ISN'T A METAL THAT CAN SIMPLY BE REFINED.

IT'S A MATERIAL WITH THOSE PROPERTIES.

SO YOU WILL, AS A MATTER OF FACT, NEED IRINE.

I HAVE THAT KNOWLEDGE, BUT I DON'T HAVE THE PHYSICAL STRENGTH ANYMORE.

PLEASE, REACH IRINE'S HEART.

AND...

TAKE HER WITH YOU FROM THIS CITY.

FROM THE BOTTOM OF HER HEART.

THAT GIRL LOVES METAL

I BEG OF YOU.

Her feelings reside in this craft---

What is Irine's dream...?

STORY XII END

TRANSLATOR: CASTELLAN
TYPESETTER: VONSFIELD
CLEANER: LOLO04
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